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The Athenian Mercury:

Saturday, *May* 12. 1694.

Queſt. 1. *I Unhappily came acquainted with one of my own Sex, whoſe Humour and Perſon I love and like above all things, and ſhe profeſſing the ſame by me, we vowed a Friendſhip to be kept inviolable 'till Death: But I'm lately aſſured by undenyable Demonſtrations that ſhe has a diſhonourable Intriegue with a Gentleman whom ſhe'd have me believe to be her Husband. I beg your Opinion, ſetting aſide the Cenſure of the World if ever it come to be known, whether I may with a good Conſcience continue our Converſation? or if this ben't a juſt Cauſe of quitting my Obligation, leſt I ſhould be one of them the Pſalmiſt ſpeaks of, who are partakers with the Adulterer?*

Anſw. The very Unwillingneſs to encourage Vice is a fair Argument of good Inclinations to Virtue; and indeed were all thoſe who are truly Virtuous ſo careful as they ought to be in this matter, never ſo much as *viſiting* or *correſponding* with thoſe who are *incorrigibly Vitious*, we might perhaps ſee Vice grow aſham'd of it ſelf, for it loves a Crowd, and the Company and Vizor of Virtue; and this our own Intereſt as well as theirs obliges us to take Care of, becauſe of the Infectious Nature of evil, eſpecially when it inſinuates under the fair Pretence of ſo amiable a *good* as *Friendſhip*. For theſe and other Reaſons, principally that Pious one the Queriſt her ſelf urges, ſhe'd do very well to break off all Correſpondence with the Criminal Perſon, who by her Crimes has firſt broken this Friendſhip, which can only be, properly ſpeaking, between Virtuous Perſons: Tho' all this ſuppoſes the Fact certain, and that the Gentleman is really none of her Husband, and yet further, thus much, there's no Queſtion is due to their paſt Friendſhip, that all Argumants be firſt uſed to Reform her, before ſhe is quite thrown off, taken from the Ugline's of Vice and Beauty of Virtue, and Friendſhip it ſelf, we being often too apt to Neglect our Duty by pretending we deſpair of doing any good, when oftentimes there's nothing but that Deſpair which obſtructs our doing it.

Queſt. 2. *A young Man under Twenty happen'd to fall in Love with a Maid much older than himſelf, whom he Courted for ſome time, and at laſt got her Conſent to make a mutual Wiſh with him, to bind each of 'em from Marrying any other, which was,* That the Party who Marry'd firſt might be debarr'd of Heaven. *The Young-man ſince that has relinquiſh'd his Pretenſions to her, and is ſo far alter'd, that his Love is turn'd into extremity of averſion and Hatred, nor can he now think of Marrying her; he's twenty five Years old, and is in Love with another Woman, whom he fully deſigns to make his Wife, unleſs your determination prevents him. I deſire to know whether this Wiſh be not void, as made inconſiderately, raſhly, in a Heat and under Age: And ſince marrying his firſt Miſtreſs when he can't love her, wou'd only make 'em both miſerable, whether he had not better marry the ſecond whom he loves, that he may be happy with her, being fully reſolved not to marry the former, and finding he muſt do worſe if he can't marry the latter: Pray Anſwer this ſpeedily?*

Anſw. If the Queriſt expected a ſpeedy Anſwer, why did he not Dare his Letter? If, as he ſays, he's already fully reſolv'd not to make her his Wife whom he's oblig'd to marry, and to make another ſo, tho' ſo terribly oblig'd to the contrary, that is to bring the Curſe of his own Oath on himſelf, and as far as he can poſſibly ſhut himſelf out of Heaven: We ſay, if he has decided the Controverſie already in his own Will, why does he deſire of us to inform his Underſtanding? but there's one *mollifying Phraſe* in the Queſtion — [*unleſs our* Determination *prevents him*] which if he has had *Patience* to ſtay 'till he heard it, it certainly will. The *Oath* they both made is ſo *ſolemn*, the *Sanction* ſo *dreadful*, that we believe there's not *room* left for 'em ſo much as to *diſentangle* one another, tho' they themſelves were both *willing*, nor can *any* thing that we ſee, beſide *Death* or *Marriage* of *one* ſide, or ſomething equivalent, vacate the *Obligation*, by rendring the *matter* of the Promiſe impoſſible to be perform'd. And this rather binds more ſtrongly on the man's ſide, becauſe 'twas he who prevail'd with the Woman to make ſuch an Oath, wherein there was no ſuch Condition expreſs'd, nor can be ſuppos'd reaſonably included, as that either ſhou'd be at *Liberty*, if they cou'd *Love* no *longer*, or *found* another they cou'd *like better*, ſince it's plain, that the *preventing* of any ſuch *Alteration* was the very *end* of the *Contract*. For it's being made *under Age*, we wonder what Chapter in the Bible he finds it written in, that 'tis lawful to be *Perjur'd* under *one* and *twenty*, or rather, that before that Time he can't be *Perjur'd* at all, tho' he ne're ſo *fain* wou'd be? Or was he not of *Age* to know the *Nature* of an *Oath*, which even our Law ſuppoſes Perſons are capable of knowing at ſixteen, and therefore admits their *Teſtimony* as *Valid?* If the *Raſhneſs*, *Inconſiderateneſs*, and *Heat* wherewith a *Vow* was made, were enough to ſet a Man clear of it, *Jeptha* might eaſily have *eſcaped* without ſo ſevere a *Tryal* of his *Patience* and *Virtue*, nor indeed wou'd there be ever *Excuſes* wanting in Caſes of that *Nature*, and *Oaths* and *Vows* wou'd be *Snapt* as ſoon as made, and the very *Publick Faith* of *Mankind vacated*, the chiefeſt *Cement* of *Society*, and ſo neceſſary a thing to the *Happineſs* of Life. However we here readily grant (for fear of the *Confounded Old Man* again, whom we ſhan't eaſily forget) that had the firſt *Miſtreſs play'd falſe*, or run *ſheer* away, and left her *Humble Servant* to ſeek for a *Help-meet* where he cou'd *get* it, that in thoſe, and ſome *equivalent Caſes*, even tho' 't had been too *Invidious* to have expreſs'd ſuch *Conditions* at the the time of *Contract*, yet the Reaſon of the *Thing* wou'd determine 'em fairly *imply'd* therein, and conſequently the Man at his *Liberty* to marry whoever he found in the *good mind* to have him, the *obligation* being certainly *reciprocal* here, and the Conſequence ſeeming to be *valid*, that if 'twas *eſſentially infring'd* on one part, it ſhou'd alſo *ceaſe* on the other. All the Liberty he has, it by no means he can love his firſt Miſtreſs, is to remain *unmarry'd*, till *Death* ſets one of 'em *free*; and for his *Living honeſt*, if he has done ſo already till *five and twenty*, he may as well, and better do ſo from thence to *fifty*, after which ſure there's no *great danger*. *However* this and ſuch other *Inſtances* ſhou'd make people more cautious of ſuch *Imprecations*, *Lovers Vows* being certainly *regiſter'd* in *Heaven*, howe're they may be *forgotten* upon *Earth*, and *Perjury* in thoſe caſes, how *ſlighted* and common ſoever it may be grown, being we believe, the cauſe of many of thoſe *unfortunate marriages* which are ſo frequently *complain'd* of.

Queſt. 3. *Not long ſince, I happened to buy a Book called* Spiritual Counſel, or the Fathers Advice to his Children, *without any Authors Name affixt to it. Yet by my own Obſervation of Language, and the great Character therein given of* Malbranches ſearch after Truth. *I conclude it to be written by that Ingenious Author, Mr.* Norris. *I therefore deſire your Opinion of that Book and the Author: And particularly, your Sentiments upon the Character he gives of* Malbranches ſearch after Truth, (*which I hear is Tranſlating in* London) *in* P. 118. *of the foremention'd Treatiſe?*

Anſw. As to the Author of that late Treatiſe, entituled, *The Fathers Advice to his Children*, we have good Reaſon to conclude Mr. *Norris* the Author thereof; 'tis written in a ſtyle ſuited to the *Meaneſt Capacity*,

city, and is also of use for Persons of a higher Rank, to direct 'em in their Studies of *Morality, Divinity, and Philosophy*. As to the Account he give of *Malbranches Search after Truth*, we think it to be nothing above what that great Author deserves. But we shall not pretend to offer our Sentiments further, after so great a Judge of *Malbranches* performance, as Mr. *Norris* is concluded to be by all Men, but shall rather give you his own Words concerning it, which in *P. Verbum*, his own Words concerning it, which in *P.* 118, 119, 120, 121. are as follows, *viz.* 'But if you 'would have a general Instrument of Knowledge, an 'universal Key, a Book that will throughly regulate, 'order, and form your Understandings, and teach you 'how to use your Intellectual Powers for the avoid-'ing of Error; and conduct you in the Search of Truth, '(a Search almost as Unsuccessful as that of *Happiness*) 'that will instruct you in the most Fundamental Theo-'ries. and prepare you for all that is further intelligi-'ble, that will purifie and refine your Minds, and brigh-'ten, clear up and inlarge your Thoughts; that will rid 'you of all your Prejudices and Sensible Prepossessions, 'give you clear and distinct Idea's of things, and fur-'nish you with true and solid Principles of Science, 'and with the most necessary and important Conclusi-'ons. In fine, If you would have a Book that is a-'lone a *Library*, and an ever-rising and flowing Spring 'of Knowledge, that ought never to be out of your 'Hands, but always to be Read, Studied, dwelt and fed 'upon till it be digested, made your own, and Con-'verted as it were into the very Substance of your 'Souls, let me recommend to you M. *Malebranche de la 'Recherche de la Verite*, a Book (tho for some consi-'derable while extant) but little known, and whose 'worth is less understood, which the *falsly Learned* 'hate, because they cannot endure its *Light*, and yet 'of such excellent and universal Use, that 'tis great 'pity any Study should be without it, or any Person 'ignorant of it, that is capable of understanding it: 'For indeed, to speak out freely what I think (tho it 'it be a more nice and hazardous thing to give Chara-'cters of Books than of Men) I take it to be upon 'all accounts one of the best Books that is in the World; 'and that of all Humane Compositures, there is none 'that does better serve the Interests of Truth, and of 'true Religion. Thus far Mr. *Norris*. This Book, which he ha' thus highly recommended to the World, has been actually Translating by Mr. *Sault*, Author of the *New Treatise of Algebra*, above eight Months, in which he has made a very considerable Progress. So that we hope to see it finisht in a little time, and we are told in *last Mondays Gazette*, that 'twill be Printed in Folio, upon an extraordinary fine Paper, and Cha-racter, and without Subscriptions done into English from the *Paris* fourth Edition.

Advertisements.

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